

Provo

PIONEER MORMON CITY

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AMERICAN GUIDE SERIES

ILLUSTRATED
GENEALOGICAL DEPARTMENT
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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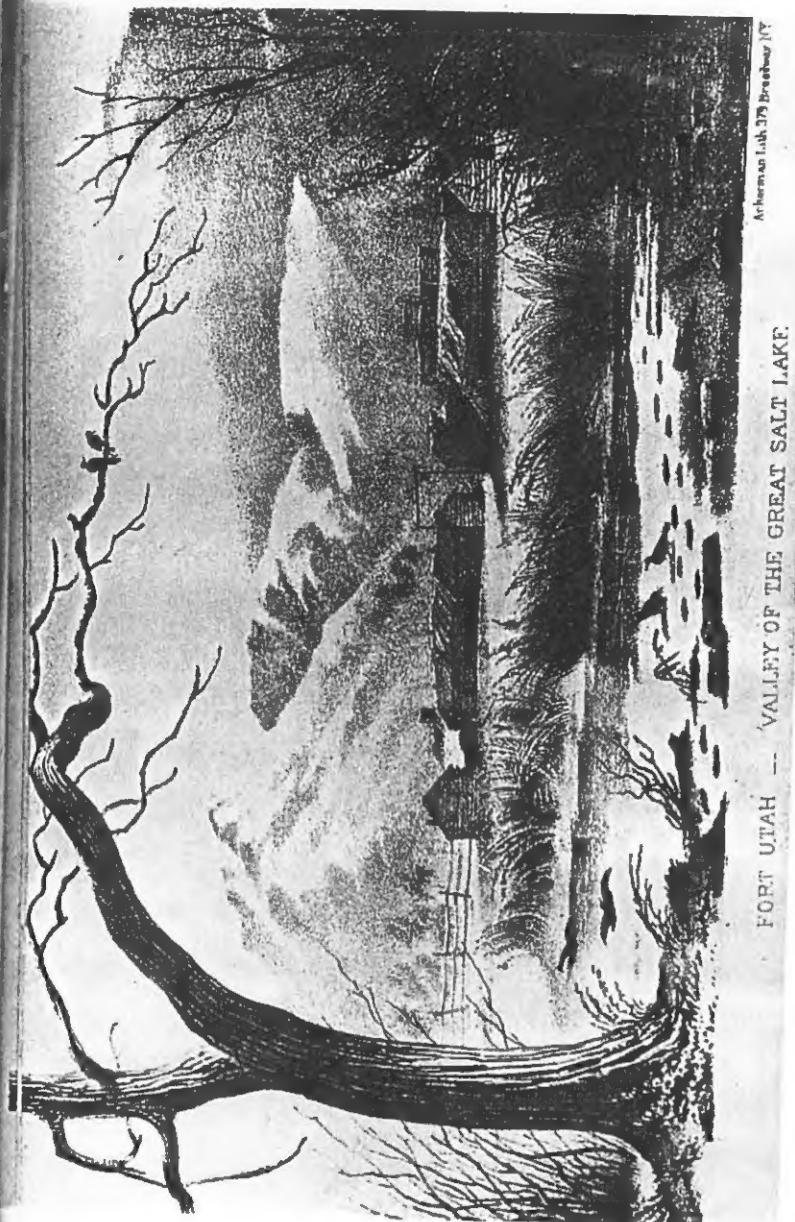
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FORT UTAH — VALLEY OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE

IV
FORT UTAH "MISSION"

MEMBERS of the expedition had been most favorably impressed by the land in Utah Valley. Oliver Huntington hazarded the opinion that this valley "would be the end of my searches to find a more pleasant and delightful home";¹ and Hosea Stout pronounced the Provo "a fine large Stream & well timbered on the Valley . . . a beautiful farming country."² Within three days after the return of the company Alexander Williams announced his intention of farming in Utah Valley; he proposed "to take some of Prest. Young's cows, and instruct the widows and orphans of the four Indians killed the previous Monday to farm, etc."³ The Indian women and children seem to have been averse to accepting such philanthropic attention, and ultimately they went north to join a Shoshone band.⁴

At a council meeting on March 10 Brigham Young called thirty men to settle Utah Valley at once "for the purpose of farming, and fishing and of instructing the Indians in cultivating the earth and teaching them civilization." John S. Higbee, William Wadsworth, Dimick B. Huntington, Samuel Ewing, Peter W. Conover, Houghton Conover, Alexander Williams, and John Scott were named to go. By March 17 thirty-three colonists were preparing to depart. The "mission" was organized the next day under the leadership of John S. Higbee, president and bishop; Isaac Higbee, first counselor, and Dimick B. Huntington, second counselor.⁵

March had nearly passed before the colonists completed their plans for departure. Wagons had to be loaded, stock rounded up, and the details of organization settled. It took three days to make the trip with ox-teams, a few horses, and cows. Farm implements were carried, together with seeds and household equipment. Only six families accompanied the original party. This was rather unusual, later "missions" taking all the families with them. As the settlers neared the banks of the Provo River, they were met by Angatewats, a young Indian brave, who blocked the trail with his horse. Dimick B. Huntington "pleaded for them to try the emigrants a while and see if they could not live in peace together."⁶ After a short parley, Huntington was 'made to raise his right hand and swear by the sun that the white people would not drive the Indians away, or take from them any of their rights.'⁷ The whites were then permitted to advance. They crossed the river and camped on the south side near the lower crossing (approximately First North and 18th West if present streets extended that distance), at what was later known as Old Fort Field.⁸

The erection of fort-style houses was commenced at once. Built around an ancient mound, "Fort Utah" measured 20 by 40 rods, and was surrounded by a 14-foot stockade with gates at the east and west ends. Box elder trees, more durable and more accessible than cottonwood trees, were used for lumber. Within the stockade, log cabins, generally roofed with split lumber and dirt, were grouped side by side. Each boasted two cloth-covered windows. Puncheons were used for flooring. The vacant spaces between the houses were filled with pickets embedded closely together in the ground. A cattle corral, attached to the southeast corner of the stockade, was used at night, and a guardhouse was erected within the corral. Smaller private corrals were placed behind some of the cabins. A

brass cannon, upon the mound, commanded the surrounding territory.⁹ The next step was to lay out the farms. These were located east, south, and west of the fort. By May, 225 acres were under cultivation.

Situated on the grounds of the annual encampment of the Ute bands who gathered from the valleys to the east and south, the little settlement was forced to cope with Indian resentment. The Indian tribes were drawn to Utah Lake by the abundance of fish moving every spring from the lake to their spawning ground up the streams. So great was the number of suckers and mullet passing up stream that frequently the river would be full from bank to bank "as thick as they could swim for hours and sometimes days together, and fish would be taken in all ways and places. The Indians could feast from morning until night for weeks together, free from all cost, except labor."¹⁰

The settlers managed to get along with the Indians until two tribes quarreled. Elk killed Jim, son of Wanship, chief of the Salt Lake Valley band, and on April 12 Wanship raided Little Chief's camp and ran off all the horses. According to Oliver B. Huntington, "Little Chief came over in tears and implored the whites to help him. In a long speech he set forth his awful situation without horses, and how it was brought on by helping them. Said he had shown himself to be a friend of the Mormons and now if they were his friends he wanted they should show it by getting his horses back." The whites sent word by express to Governor Young, who called out an armed force to scare the Indians into compliance. Wanship, however, strode up to the captain of the company "and fired a gun immediately over his head. Saying he was ready to die; that his men had periled their lives for those horses, and according to all their laws they belonged to them; and every man, woman and child in his village should die before the horses should go back, that all of them did not

pay for his son and horse." Wanship insisted, however, that he had no desire to fight the whites. He agreed to move on north. Little Chief meantime had organized an avenging force of some fifteen men, and on April 20 he passed through Great Salt Lake City in search of his foe. Wanship was overtaken by Little Chief and his band, apparently in Ogden Hole. Little Chief retook his horses, with some of Wanship's for good measure, but next morning Wanship, in another counter stroke, retook more than half of all the horses, Little Chief and three of his men falling in the battle.¹¹

Thomas S. Williams rode in from Fort Bridger to report that Old Elk and the war chief, Walker, in consequence of some fighting between Americans and Utes near Taos, were agitating Ute bands to fight the whites in Utah Valley. Young warned John S. Higbee on April 18 to "speedily complete their fort, to keep near the settlement, to place their cannon on the top of the fort, to gather a sufficient quantity of round stones for grape shot, to secure and guard their horses and cattle, to keep a vigilant guard at night, to look out for the Indians, not to make them any presents, but, if they would be friendly, to teach them to raise grain and order them to quit stealing."¹² Dimick Huntington replied, on April 19, that "Patsower, an influential Indian, a brother of one that we killed, came in yesterday and cut up high swells. . . . I have made him our friend. He says a great deal about Walker coming in soon. . . . We marshaled ourselves yesterday and find twenty muskets in camp and no cartridges, I wish you would send by Capt. Hunt twenty rounds apiece for each gun, if you think it best. We will take care of the ammunition. We have but one keg of powder and no cartridges. I think it would be good to have another keg. . . . We fired the cannon once, and it had a good effect. There is quite a number of Indians in this vicinity;